# Learning to Communicate Across Language and Culture: Demographic Change, Schools, and Parents in Adult ESL Classes

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## Abstract

This article explores communication between parents who are adult English learners (ELs) and K–12 educators in a Virginia region that has seen a rapid increase in the number of immigrant families. Using a social capital lens, communication is viewed as the means through which information between families and educators is exchanged and authentic partnerships that support student learning and well-being become possible. The research explored the extent to which parents enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes prioritized home–school communication, the nature of parent–school communication among adult English learners and educators, and perceived challenges and supports for parent–school communication. Data analyzed were drawn from a multiple-embedded case study over 18 months. Data sources included responses to an adult ESL learner survey; semi-structured interviews with parents, K–12 educators and administrators, and adult ESL instructors; and documents. Study findings revealed parents enrolled in the ESL classes referenced home–school communication, identified challenges and supports particular to different forms of communication (oral, written, electronic), and illuminated the critical role of intermediaries who offer language and cultural interpretation. The study findings provide insights for educators and leaders seeking to foster meaningful, authentic home–school communication in new immigrant destination communities.

Key Words: home–school communication, family engagement, English learners, adult ESL education, immigrants, parents, teachers, liaisons

## Introduction

Communication is the cornerstone of family–school relations. Through interactions educators and families exchange information, understand the priorities and perspectives of one another, and forge relationships that support a child's learning and well-being. Policies and best practices call for communication that is authentic, meaningful, and involves dialogue (e.g., Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Yet developing and maintaining such communication is often difficult to fully realize. There also exists a well-documented history of communication challenges between educators and parents of nondominant groups (e.g., Auerbach, 2007; Baquedano-Lopéz, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Ferguson, 2008; Schutz, 2006). For many educators and families who are not native English speakers, differences in language, culture, and experiences with schooling add further complexity (Guo, 2010; Turney & Kao, 2009; Vera et al., 2012).

Since the 1990s, immigrant and refugee families have migrated to communities across the U.S. with little recent history of demographic change (Lichter, 2012; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). These "new destinations" refer to geographic areas that historically have not been large receivers of new immigrants and experienced a rate of growth well above the national average over the past 20 years (Terrazas, 2011). School systems in such communities often have limited background for working with families who bring different language needs, cultural experiences, expectations, and practices associated with educating children (Brezicha & Hopkins, 2016; Jensen, 2006; Lowenhaupt & Reeves, 2015; Wainer, 2004; Zehler et al., 2008). School systems in new destination communities often have had less time to prepare for these demographic shifts. Immigration policy is a politically charged topic in many states including Virginia, where 12% of the population was estimated to be foreign born in 2017 (U.S. Census, n.d.). State-level policies such as the legality of sanctuary jurisdictions, access to public services, driver's licenses, and in-state tuition set the stage for local responses to foreign-born individuals and their families. Long-time residents and leaders may be ambivalent about or unreceptive to the arrival of immigrants in the community. The political will to secure necessary resources and create supportive conditions may be limited beyond that required by state and federal law. As such, these districts are less likely to have existing infrastructure, dedicated resources, and professional staff with language and cross-cultural preparation to support English learner (EL)

students and their families. School system responses to increased enrollment of EL students have tended to take an "ad hoc" approach (Zehler et al., 2008, p. 21), using existing resources until that approach is no longer viable. School communication with immigrant and refugee families may be less embedded in district practices and vary across schools within a district (Marschall, Shah, & Donato, 2012; Wainer, 2004; Zehler et al., 2008).

This article draws on case study data to explore reported communication between adult English learners who are parents and K–12 educators in a region that has seen a rapid increase in the number of immigrant families. The research questions guiding this inquiry are as follows: (1) To what extent do parents enrolled in adult ESL[1] classes prioritize home–school communication? (2) What is the nature of parent–school communication among adult English learners and educators? (3) What challenges are perceived to constrain parent–school communication? and (4) What supports are identified that facilitate parent–school communication? The study findings can provide insights for educators and leaders to foster meaningful, authentic home–school communication in new destination communities by exploring the perspectives of parents who are English learners, K–12 educators and leaders, and adult ESL instructors who work with parents.

## Theoretical Framework

This article uses a social capital lens to examine parent–school communication as the means through which information between parents and educators is exchanged, relationships are forged, and trust and authentic partnerships that support student learning and well-being become possible (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 1988; Crosnoe, 2009). Communication is embedded in and shaped by individual and organizational expectations, priorities, constraints, dispositions, and power arrangements (e.g., Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007). While current polices and research call for home–school communication that emphasizes meaningful and authentic two-way exchanges, this can be elusive.

Common strategies for enabling home–school communication can be conceptualized along a continuum from one-way to two-way communication. Newsletters, websites, automated calls, and mass emails are inherently one-way flows of information (Graham-Clay, 2005; Heath, Maghrabi, & Carr, 2015). A formal school presentation—such as one intended to inform a group of parents about curriculum or college planning—could be a one-directional communication event, if it is structured so that speakers provide information but limit opportunities for input from the audience (Guo, 2010). A parent–

teacher conference, individual meeting with the principal or counselor, or an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) meeting holds greater potential for two-way exchanges of information. It is in these settings parents and educators have face-to-face interactions about an individual child. These events, too, can vary in the degree to which there are meaningful exchanges between parents and teachers (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Home visits offer even greater potential for meaningful exchange as educators step into the homes of families, thus shifting the balance of power (Johnson, 2014).

Oral and written English call on varying skills and supports for educators and parents. Spoken language requires the ability to interact orally and understand nuance in real time. Comprehension of written English is influenced by an individual's literacy in the first language (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). Parents may have a first language that has no written form or have had limited access to literacy instruction in that language. The first language may use a different alphabet or not use an alphabet. In addition, schools use many technological strategies to share information with families such as email, text messages, and Twitter. The "digital divide" between those who use the internet and those who do not appears to be narrowing among foreign-born Latinos and those who are Spanish-dominant language speakers, according to a 2016 Pew report (Brown, López, & Lopez, 2016). Among foreign-born Latinos surveyed, 78% reported using the internet in 2015 compared to 51% in 2009; similarly, 74% of Spanish-dominant respondents used the internet in 2015 compared to 36% in 2009. More foreign-born Latinos reported use of mobile internet (75%) than home-based internet (48%; Brown et al., 2016).

Cultural differences in communication styles, educational backgrounds, values, and beliefs also shape exchanges (e.g., Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003; Valdés, 1996). Research consistently finds that immigrant parents care deeply about their child's education but often struggle to be heard, and they find understanding and navigating school environments and expectations challenging (e.g., Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001; Guo, 2010; Olivos, 2012; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014; Sibley & Dearing, 2014; Trumbull et al., 2003; Valdés, 1996; Vera et al., 2012). At the same time, educators draw on their own experiences, beliefs, and values to make meaning of the parent engagement efforts they observe (e.g., Caspe, 2003; Eberly et al., 2007; Olivos, 2012). A significant concern in the parent and family engagement literature centers on the ways in which educators are more likely to recognize, seek, and therefore privilege the dominant culture's values and beliefs about the role of families in a child's education (e.g., Auerbach, 2007; Baquedano-Lopéz et al., 2013; Ferguson, 2008; Lareau, 1989; Poza et al., 2014, Valdés, 1996).

In addition, school staff are more likely to be aware of parent engagement they observe directly—at the school and through individual communications. Home-based activities such as homework support and speaking with one's child about school are typically beyond educators' view. In numerous studies, immigrant parents and those of other nondominant groups report engaging in more home-based than school-based support (e.g., Auerbach, 2007; Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011).

Educators' awareness and understanding of a family's cultural background shape communication efforts. For example, Haneda and Alexander (2015) found that among ESL teachers interviewed, those with multilingual skills or intercultural experiences (such as time spent in another country) were stronger advocates for students than monolingual teachers with limited intercultural experiences. Bilingual and ESL teachers can be valuable resources for other educators (Nieto, 2017). Joshi and her colleagues (2005) identified a disconnect between what surveyed teachers viewed as important influences on student learning (communication patterns, social values, ways of learning) and the lesser extent to which these educators reported gathering information about these influences among the families of their students.

Parent perceptions of a welcoming environment contribute to why immigrant parents are—or are not—engaged (e.g., Ferguson, 2008; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Sibley & Dearing, 2014; Turney & Kao, 2009). A welcoming environment signals that families' cultural and linguistic background are valued. An analysis of national Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS–K) data found that foreign-born parents along with native-born African American parents were more likely than native-born White parents to report they did not feel welcome at their child's school (Turney & Kao, 2009). Similarly, Vera and her colleagues (2012) found school climate and language predicted immigrant parent communication with teachers. In addition, studies also point to the influential role of specific invitations from both the school staff and the child in parents' decisions to become involved (e.g., Trumbull et al., 2003; Walker et al., 2011).

Intermediaries are often engaged to help facilitate communication between parents and educators (e.g., Brezicha & Hopkins, 2016; Guo, 2010; Haneda & Alexander, 2015; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Yohani, 2013). These intermediaries can provide crucial language and cultural facilitation and may be particularly important in communities that are adapting to rapid or unplanned demographic changes. For families, these individuals are a key resource for learning about and navigating schools (e.g., Brezicha & Hopkins, 2016; Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, & Ali, 2014; Guo, 2010; Yohani, 2013). For educators, these facilitators aid in understanding the perspectives of immigrant families (e.g., Brezicha

& Hopkins, 2016; Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa, & Allen, 2005; Prins & Toso, 2012; Yohani, 2013). Intermediaries may be district employees—family liaisons or home–school coordinators with specified responsibilities for engaging with families—or educators whose primary role is educating children but who also engage with families, such as ESL teachers, language teachers, or paraeducators. Intermediaries may also be external to a school district working in social work, adult education, or faith-based organizations.

Intermediaries are able to facilitate communication differently by virtue of the organizational contexts within which they work. School-based intermediaries are employees of their school systems. As such, they are likely to have firsthand knowledge of the needs and priorities of the school and to have relationships with teacher colleagues and their supervisor—the principal—that can facilitate conveying school priorities to families. At the same time, as institutional agents, there is inherent pressure to prioritize communication that supports the goals and expectations of the school and colleagues over the needs and priorities of families when these two are in conflict (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007; Yohani, 2013). On the other hand, intermediaries external to the school system may have less direct knowledge of school priorities but have greater autonomy to develop relationships with parents and facilitate communication that reflects family needs and priorities (Brezicha & Hopkins, 2016; Shiffman, 2013).

## Methods

The findings presented in this article are drawn from a multiple embedded case study (Yin, 2014) conducted in 2014–15. The study explored the engagement beliefs, practices, and experiences of parents who were enrolled in general adult ESL classes. Data were collected through a large regional program operated by a community college that offered free adult ESL classes in three jurisdictions (rural, rural/suburban, and urban) and the three corresponding school districts.

### Setting

This agricultural region of Virginia was composed historically of family farms, towns, and a handful of small cities. The population was, and still is, predominantly White, non-Hispanic. Beginning in the early 2000s, immigrants began to settle in the area, filling jobs in newly located poultry and other manufacturing plants. In the rural and rural/suburban counties where the study took place, 2–3% of the population was foreign born in 2000 compared to 5–6% in 2015. During the same period, the city's foreign-born population

went from approximately 7% to 11%. The region has also seen an increase in the Hispanic population. In 2000, the Hispanic population was less than 2% in the rural county, less than 4% in the rural/suburban county, and 6.5% in the city. By 2015, these percentages had almost or more than doubled (see Table 1). In 2015, the poverty rate in the rural and urban counties exceeded the state average while the rural/suburban rate was below average.

Table 1. Jurisdiction and School District Demographics

| | Rural %* | Rural/Suburban %* | Urban %* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Population** (2015) | | | |
| - White, Non-Hispanic | 89 | 85 | 68 |
| - Hispanic | 7 | 7 | 16 |
| - Poverty | 12 | 7 | 16 |
| - Foreign-Born | 5 | 6 | 11 |
| **School District Enrollment** (2014–15) | | | |
| - White, Non-Hispanic | 80 | 75 | 46 |
| - Hispanic | 12 | 13 | 33 |
| - Economically Disadvantaged | 44 | 35 | 59 |
| - English Learner | 6 | 6 | 20 |

* Percentages rounded to nearest zero.
Sources: U.S. Census (n.d.), Virginia Department of Education (n.d.), school district reports

With federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding, the regional adult education program offered adult ESL classes to approximately 275 adults.[2] The ESL classes were general in focus, designed to serve adult learners with varied goals for studying English. As such, the adult learners comprised a combination of parents with school-age children and those without children, were of diverse ages, and had educational backgrounds ranging from no formal schooling to graduate degrees.

The school districts in each of the three jurisdictions had increased enrollments of English learners and shortages of ESL teachers and educators who spoke Spanish. In Virginia, teachers must hold a valid teaching license and an ESL endorsement (Regulations Governing Licensure, 2007). The ESL endorsement is satisfied by either graduating from an approved teacher preparation program in ESL or completion of 24 semester hours of coursework in six specified areas. In the rural district, ESL instructors and Spanish language educators were providing much of the language interpretation for families. This district was in the process of expanding supports—including adding new

family liaison positions—under district leaders who were encouraging greater interaction with the immigrant community. The rural/suburban district appeared to rely heavily on ESL teachers and school guidance counselors for communication between schools and families. At the middle and high schools, ESL teachers divided their time between schools. The urban district had the largest EL enrollment and most extensive resources and infrastructure in place, including a family liaison who was a dual English and Spanish language speaker at each school.

### Data Collection

Five adult ESL sites located in three jurisdictions were purposefully selected to represent variation based on geographic location (rural, suburban, urban), class schedule (day, evening), and type of facility where classes were housed (public schools, churches). A total of 20 classes were offered across the five locations. Primary data sources for this article included semi-structured interviews with parents enrolled in these adult ESL classes, adult ESL instructors, and K–12 educators and administrators; an adult ESL learner survey; and documents (see Table 2).

Table 2. Data Sources

| | Adult ESL Classes | | | School Districts | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Class Location** | **Interviews** | | **Parent Survey** (*N*=85) | **District** (*N*=14) | **Interviews** | |
| | Parents (*N*=14) | Instructors (*N*=9)* | | | School | District Office |
| Rural School | 2 | 3* | 8 | Rural 4 | 1 Spanish Teacher (HS) 1 ESL Teacher (ES) | 2 Dept. Heads |
| Rural Church | 5 | 1 | 8 | | | |
| Rural/ Suburb School | -- | 3* | 17 | Rural/ Suburb 3 | 2 ESL Teachers (MS/HS) | 1 Dept. Head |
| Urban Church | 2 | 2* | 22 | Urban 7 | 2 Principals (ES) 2 Family Liaisons (ES) 2 ESL Teachers (ES) | 1 Senior Leader |
| Urban School | 5 | 3* | 30 | | | |

*Nine instructors were interviewed; four taught at multiple locations.
ES = Elementary School; MS = Middle School; HS = High School

*Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 37 participants: 14 parents enrolled in the adult ESL classes; 14 school district educators and administrators; and nine adult ESL instructors. Parents of school-age children were invited to participate in interviews during the researcher's visits to the adult ESL classes throughout the study year.[3] All who expressed interest in participating were interviewed. Twelve participants with children enrolled in PreK–12 were mothers, and two were fathers (see Table 3). All had lived in the U.S. for at least a few years. Twelve parents were Spanish speakers, one spoke French, and one spoke Russian. The interviews explored parent engagement roles, experiences with local schools, and connections between participation in adult ESL and supporting a child's education.

The 14 school district participants were purposefully selected because they had responsibilities for family engagement at the policy or programmatic level and/or had direct, regular engagement with families. These participants included six district and school administrators, five ESL teachers, one Spanish teacher, and two family liaisons. These interviews explored general perceptions of family–school communication and strategies and challenges associated with engaging immigrant families.

By virtue of their roles and professional backgrounds, the adult ESL instructors provided additional insights into parent engagement and experiences with the schools. These adult ESL instructors had regular contact with parents enrolled in their classes and were familiar with parents' priorities for and challenges with communication. The researcher sent an email request for an interview to all instructors teaching general adult ESL classes in the regional program. All nine who expressed an interest in participating during the study year were interviewed. Eight had experience working with public schools in the region as teachers, staff, or volunteers. Three of the instructors were immigrants, and a different combination of four instructors spoke Spanish.

Table 3. Parent Interview Participants

| | Age | Primary Work | Place of Origin | Formal Education | ESL Class Location | School District | No. of Children in PreK–High School | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | PK | ES | MS | HS |
| Mother | 38 | Homemaker | Mexico | H.S. Degree +GED | Rural School | Rural | 1 | | 1 | 1 |
| Father | 41 | Factory Worker | Guatemala | H.S. Degree | Rural School | Rural | | | 1 | |
| Mother | 53 | Nurse | West Africa | Postsecondary | Rural Church | Rural | | | 1 | 1 |
| Mother | 38 | Homemaker | Puerto Rico | Postsecondary | Rural Church | Rural | | 1 | | |
| Father | 53 | Manufacturer | Guatemala | None | Rural Church | Rural | 1 | | | |
| Mother | 37 | Homemaker | Mexico | 6th Grade | Rural Church | Rural | 1 | 2 | | |
| Mother | 34 | Homemaker | Guatemala | None | Rural Church | Rural | | 1 | 2 | |
| Mother | 44 | Food Services | Mexico | H.S. Degree | Urban Church | Rural/ Suburban | | 1 | 1 | |
| Mother | 39 | Homemaker | El Salvador | Unknown | Urban School | Rural/ Suburban | | 1 | | |
| Mother | 43 | Homemaker | Ukraine | Postsecondary | Urban Church | City | | 1 | 1 | |
| Mother | 36 | Homemaker | Mexico | Unknown | Urban School | City | | 1 | | |
| Mother | 29 | Homemaker | Mexico | Unknown | Urban School | City | | 1 | | |
| Mother/Aunt | 34 | Restaurant Manager | El Salvador | Unknown | Urban School | City | 1* | | | 1* |
| Mother | 41 | Homemaker | El Salvador | Unknown | Urban School | City | | | 1 | 1 |

* This mother had a high school age daughter who she planned to enroll in the fall and a nephew preparing for kindergarten.

ES = Elementary School; MS = Middle School; HS = High School

*Adult ESL Learner Survey*

In late spring 2015, a paper survey was administered in English and Spanish by the instructors to adult ESL learners during two class meetings. Of enrolled adult ESL learners, 62% returned the survey. All were asked to complete the question, "This school year, do you have a child in school (Kindergarten–12th grade)?" Respondents who checked "no" ended their participation in the survey. Slightly more than half of the respondents checked "yes" and were asked to complete the full survey. Thus, reported results are drawn from the 85 parents with school-age children who completed the survey. The 21 English surveys were completed by those who spoke a language other than Spanish or preferred to complete the survey in English. The remaining 64 were completed in Spanish. The ESL program coordinator orally administered the survey and recorded answers for a small number of parents who did not have the literacy skills to complete the survey independently. Survey items analyzed for this article include demographic information, open-ended questions that explored motivations for taking the adult ESL class and perceived impacts of the adult ESL class on parent engagement, and responses on a parent involvement role activity beliefs scale developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005). The scale explores common parent engagement activities, including home–school communication, homework assistance, and speaking with one's child, using a 6-point Likert-style response option (1 = disagree very strongly; 2 = disagree; 3 = disagree just a little; 4 = agree just a little; 5 = agree; 6 = agree very strongly).

*Documents and Websites*

Publicly available information from school, district, and state department of education websites were collected. U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) data were collected for the three jurisdictions. School quality profiles that covered the study period were obtained from the Virginia Department of Education (n.d.) website for the three districts. Information included student enrollment data (e.g., English learners, race and ethnicity, economic disadvantage) and accountability measures (e.g., accreditation status). Additional policy and program documents examined included school district budgets, strategic plans, family engagement policies, and superintendent communications to the community. School and district websites were reviewed to analyze access to and ease of navigation to find publicly available information for families with particular attention to the availability of information in languages other than English and academic resources for parents to support students.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was guided by the larger study's research question (What is the nature of parent engagement in education among parents enrolled in adult ESL classes?) and the family engagement research literature. Qualitative data from the open-ended survey responses and interview transcripts were analyzed in multiple coding cycles (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). During the first cycle, communication between home and school emerged as a dominant theme in frequency and scope. In the second cycle, an open coding approach was used to more closely examine the communication-coded data. Codes developed at this stage were communication topics, modes of interaction, challenges, language and culture, and perspectives regarding what facilitates communication. To provide a snapshot of parent perceptions across the five adult ESL class locations, basic frequencies for the role activity beliefs instrument were calculated. The statement, "I believe it's my responsibility to communicate with my child's teacher regularly," emerged as a strong role activity belief among survey respondents. The documents and websites were analyzed to further investigate questions that emerged during analysis of interview and survey data. Triangulating data from multiple sources (parents, K–12 educators and administrators, adult ESL instructors) and modes of data collection (interviews, survey, documents) provided converging evidence of patterns in the data (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2014).

## Limitations and Delimitations

Parents and adult ESL instructors often viewed speaking with the researcher as an opportunity to share parent perspectives and to practice English skills with a native speaker. Language and literacy were ongoing considerations. Twelve of the 14 parent interviews were conducted in English. Some interviews likely missed nuances that would have surfaced had the interview been conducted in the parent's native language. Two parent interviews were conducted with interpretation from an adult ESL instructor in one case, and a fellow adult learner in the other. For verification, the Spanish audio recordings were independently translated by a professional service. This service also translated the open-ended responses on the Spanish-language survey. The quotes from parents in this article are presented verbatim to authentically reflect their voices. As noted previously, the adult ESL coordinator orally administered the survey to parents who did not have the literacy skills necessary to complete it independently.

It is important to recognize that by virtue of their enrollment in adult ESL (in the case of parents) or role (in the case of K–12 educators and adult ESL

instructors) and their willingness to participate in the research, interview participants were likely to have reflected on and valued communication between English learners and community institutions. A decision to attend an ESL class indicates an adult learner's motivation to build English language communication skills. Similarly, the educators who agreed to participate in interviews may have been more likely to value communication between EL families and schools than those not interviewed. These individuals were purposefully selected because they held specialized knowledge of the nature of home–school communication in this region and could describe opportunities and challenges from their perspectives as interested parties.

## Findings

This section begins by describing the frequency with which parents identified home–school communication in the adult ESL learner survey. Next, the section explores the nature of home–school communication concentrating on the three most commonly referenced forms: face-to-face, written, and electronic. Identified challenges and supports specific to each form are examined. This section then turns to the cross-cutting emphasis on relationships, including the importance of a welcoming environment and the role of intermediaries in facilitating parent–school communication.

### Parent Attention to Home–School Communication

The survey results provide a gauge of parent beliefs about engagement across the five class locations. Home–school communication was one of three types of engagement most frequently mentioned (in addition to homework support and speaking with one's child). On the role activities belief scale, 85 parents responded to the statement, "I believe it's my responsibility to communicate with my child's teacher regularly." Of these, 93% ($n$ = 79) either "agreed very strongly" ($n$ = 49) or "agreed" ($n$ = 30). For comparison with reported home-based activities, the most strongly identified belief was "talk with my child about the school day" (63 "agreed very strongly," 19 "agreed"), followed by "help my child with homework" (56 "agreed very strongly," 19 "agreed").

References to home–school communication appeared in the open-ended survey responses regarding motivations for and results of taking adult ESL classes as well. At the beginning of the survey, prior to the parent engagement questions, respondents were asked, "Why are you taking this class?" Of the 76 parents who provided a response, 30 gave at least one reason related to their child's education. Of these 30, half specifically mentioned communicating with school personnel ($n$ = 12) or understanding communications from the

school (*n* = 3). Representative responses include one from a father of elementary and middle school children who stated, "Porque quiero aprender mas y para comunicarme con los maestros de mis hijos" [Because I want to learn more and to be able to communicate with my children's teachers]. A mother of elementary school children wrote, "Porque necesito hablar ingles poder me entender con las maestras de mis hijos" [Because I need to speak English to be able to understand my children's teachers]. As a point of comparison, 19 respondents specifically identified assistance with homework, and four identified communicating with their child.

A second question later in the survey asked respondents, "Do ESL classes help parents help children with school?" Most (88%) answered "yes." The open-ended follow up, "Please explain your answer," yielded 63 responses. Prevalent themes included communicating with school staff, attending school events, and understanding school communications from 15 respondents, assistance with homework from 22 respondents, and interacting with one's child from 13 respondents. Representative communication quotes include those from a father of elementary school children who wrote, "Because I can speak with my child's teachers," and a mother of a high school student who stated, "The parents can understand every communication letter."

Looking across the two open-ended questions, a total of 25 parents mentioned home–school communication. The majority were mothers (*n* = 21). All five class locations were represented and included 14 of the 20 classes; one to four parents per class mentioned home–school communication. English skill levels ranged from beginning to advanced. Similarly, parental education backgrounds ranged from no schooling to graduate degrees. Consistent with overall survey proportions, 16 parents had a child in elementary, eight had a child in middle, and 10 had a child in high school (some parents had children in multiple grade levels).

The adult ESL classes were designed to serve the diverse learning goals of the adult learners in each class. As such, instructors developed lessons that reflected their adult learners' priorities for learning English. Goals varied and related to employment, further education, basic survival in the community, and—for some parents—family engagement in education. Several adult ESL instructors observed that some parents identified specific parent engagement goals, and others approached them informally with questions related to parent–school communication. For example, an instructor who was also an elementary school teacher explained that "sometimes they will talk to me about parent–teacher conferences or homework." Another instructor noted that she talked to parents "about going in and meeting with teachers." A third instructor responded that her adult learners talked about their kids and schools in class "because that is one of their goals."

Home–school communication was addressed in each of the 14 parent interviews as well. Themes in the parent interview data centered on motivations for taking the adult ESL class to improve communication and understanding of school messages, and on experiences, supports, and challenges associated with home–school communication. The next three sections explore forms of home–school communication from the perspectives of parents, K–12 educators, and adult ESL instructors, drawing on data from all sources.

### Face-to-Face Communication

The in-person interactions cited most frequently by parents, adult ESL instructors, and K–12 educators were parent–teacher conferences: traditional conferences held once or twice a year, IEP meetings, or specially scheduled individual meetings. According to rural district educators, immigrant parents were most likely to visit the schools when they had a meeting about their child. A rural district administrator observed, "If you have a parent meeting, they're there." A high school Spanish teacher in the same district echoed this observation, noting that while work schedules and transportation might limit participation at traditional parent–teacher conferences, "if you call on the phone, they're here like that." Additional opportunities for face-to-face interaction included school-sponsored events such as registration, book fairs, and regular group meetings designed specifically for EL families to learn about the education system. Attendance at large events varied. An adult ESL instructor teaching primarily in the rural part of the region described families' decision to attend large school events as "a safety thing"; she observed that participation for individuals increased over time as they "feel more comfortable." A principal in the urban district found that immigrant parents were "very reluctant [to ask questions] if they're around other parents whose first language is English." The topics of face-to-face communication described by participants centered on academics, special needs, school registration, and—less frequently—behavior concerns and college and career readiness.

During in-person meetings with teachers and other education professionals, many parents relied on interpreters to facilitate communication. These individuals included family members and school-based or contracted individuals. For parents less proficient in English, having a school-based interpreter reduced parent anxiety about communicating with teachers and staff. One father, who never attended school in his home country, said that he was relieved to be greeted by a Spanish-speaking interpreter when he registered his daughter for kindergarten. A mother whose child had a hearing impairment felt increasingly more confident to visit on her own because a school interpreter was present. Previously she only went with her husband.

While access to a school-provided interpreter is important, many parents in this study preferred—when possible—to communicate directly with the teacher or rely on a family member to interpret. As adult ESL learners, they were motivated to independently communicate. Some also expressed concern that the interpreter might not accurately convey what the parent wanted to say. In several instances, parents said they relied on a spouse with stronger English skills to take the lead during the conference. A mother whose child attended school in the rural/suburban district said that her husband always accompanied her to the conferences conducted in English, "My husband speaking English…he help me." A mother whose child attended school in the urban district also waited for her American-born husband to attend conferences with her: "I always push my husband to go together, and he try explain to me, but he sometimes forgot. Sometimes I don't understand." A mother in the rural district explained that she went to parent–teacher conferences with her husband, but he was encouraging her to go on her own and not be afraid to ask questions, "He tell me all the time, you no understand the question, ask…again." Some K–12 educators and adult ESL instructors described children providing interpretation for families but noted this was less common now than in the past.

Communicating independently required additional time, patience, and practice. Some parents and adult ESL instructors raised the concern that the short slots for parent–teacher conferences did not allow enough time for them to express themselves. One mother's eagerness to communicate independently highlights the risks for miscommunication. This former teacher from Puerto Rico was a strong advocate for her son with special needs. She measured her progress in English by her ability to understand and be understood at IEP meetings and appointments with therapists. In a meeting with her son's teachers, she believed both she and the teachers had understood one another well. "The people said they understand me, and [I] understand all the people, psychology, social worker, nurse." However, during the interviews, her English pronunciation and grammar were difficult for the researcher to understand, and there were instances in which the researcher rephrased what she believed to be simple questions multiple times. This suggests the potential risk of miscommunication that can occur when parents and educators believe they are clearly understood by the other. This is particularly worrisome when the conversation involves navigating the complex legal, medical, and practical terrain of special education.

### Written Communication

When asked how parents know what is happening in the school and understand their child's progress, many parents, adult ESL instructors, and K–12 educators referred to written materials, such as papers and forms sent home

in a child's folder and individual notes. The school district educators also described newsletters and other general mailings. In the three districts, many forms such as enrollment and registration papers were translated into Spanish. However, the quality of the translation varied according to participants. An ESL teacher in the rural/suburban district observed that his students often brought him translated documents and asked him to clarify so that they could explain the documents to their parents. He believed some information did not reach parents. "A lot of that information about programs and stuff like that gets to them via these forms, and so, I don't know how much of that probably falls through the cracks."

Parent challenges with written communication ranged from comfort and facility with written English to a less common but significant challenge for parents who had difficulty reading and writing in their native language as well. A mother with a graduate degree was reluctant to communicate in writing with her son's middle school teachers because she was self-conscious about grammar. "It's hard for me to email to teacher because my grammar not correct and not enough." She had concerns about her son's progress and questions about the curriculum but waited to have face-to-face conversations with teachers—opportunities that tend to be fewer when children are in middle and high school. By contrast, the mother who was a former teacher preferred to communicate in writing rather than orally because she felt more confident in her writing ability. Similarly, email communication use was related to parents' comfort communicating in writing. Another mother with strong English skills and comfort with email said she communicated with her daughters' teachers through a combination of email and visits to the school.

While online automated translation programs can quickly convert written communication into many languages, these programs can create odd results. A family liaison in the urban district explained, "It's good for getting a basic understanding, but it can burn you." Liaisons in the urban district preferred to do their own translation. An adult ESL instructor and Spanish speaker observed that errors were rare in the urban district's translated documents. The rural and rural/suburban districts appeared to have fewer in-house resources to translate documents. When asked about the automated translation, an ESL teacher in the rural/suburban district estimated, "I would say it was 85% accurate and useable." The mother who was a former teacher explained the rural school forms often were written in "bad Spanish" that was "very confuse for the parents." Parents with higher English proficiency preferred written communication in English because they could look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary. One mother recommended including both English and Spanish versions in one document.

Other parents had low literacy skills in their native language. A family liaison in the urban district observed that sometimes she had difficulty reading texts from parents written in Spanish: "If I read all the syllables together, I can figure out what they're trying to say to me. But they break the words in funny places, or they don't break them." Some K–12 educators and adult ESL instructors worried educators misinterpreted parent unresponsiveness to written communications—even when translated into Spanish—as parent disinterest, rather than low literacy skills. An adult ESL instructor and former teacher in the rural district explained,

> Our mistake is that we think, "Oh, they speak Spanish. We'll just put it in Spanish for them," but we don't understand that actually it's a lack of education. They don't actually know how to read. So you can give it to them in any language, Chinese, and they still couldn't read it, and so that's why they're not signing it.

Two parents interviewed did not have the literacy skills necessary to read Spanish or English information sent from the school but were developing those skills in the adult ESL classes. The urban elementary school liaison maintained a list of families who may have reading difficulty, "because I realized wait, this could be not just one situation….There could be quite a few, and in fact there are."

### Electronic Communication

Internet use was highly variable among parents interviewed. Most had smart phones, but many did not use a computer and/or internet at home. In addition to access, some parents had difficulty operating computers and navigating the district and school websites. The adult ESL instructors and K–12 educators believed many EL families had difficulties accessing information via electronic modes. The family liaison at one of the urban elementary schools estimated that "probably 50% of the population knows how to navigate the internet and website." As a result, staff at this school relied more heavily on paper materials and phone calls.

Parents' use of the school and district websites to find information and resources appeared limited among the parent interview participants with both strong and limited internet skills. For example, a father said that he looked at the school website sometimes, but it was not updated regularly, "They don't got the information…not recent." Navigating these websites to access information posed difficulty for parents interviewed, the adult ESL instructors, and the researcher as an outsider. An adult ESL instructor described trying to find the school calendar and other information on school websites: "You really have to be willing to dig in there." The researcher's experiences exploring these

websites to find information were similar. Two mothers separately approached her seeking academic resources to assist their children. After some investigation, she showed them academic links on the district websites. It appeared the mothers had not considered these sites as a resource for addressing their concerns. An ESL teacher in the rural/suburban district believed the majority of immigrant parents did not use the parent portal on the school websites: "[It] depends if the website offers more in Spanish, [some] will go there, they will check. They do that. But…those are probably not the most." Several interviewees—parents, adult ESL instructors, and K–12 educators—expressed interest in holding workshops for parents. One rural/suburban ESL teacher found that parents "want you to show them what the kid is doing, how can they…log in [to] the computer."

### Creating a Welcoming Environment

The school supports most frequently identified in parent interviews tended to be relational in nature. Similarly, the educator interviewees identified the need to create an environment in schools in which parents felt welcome and valued. As a region with a growing Spanish-speaking population and a shortage of educators who spoke the language, the majority of attention and resources were focused on Spanish. For the Spanish-speaking parents interviewed, the presence of someone at the school who spoke at least some Spanish was central to feeling welcome. The mother who was a former teacher observed that her fellow Spanish speakers' faces changed when they saw a Spanish-language facilitator at school events.

When asked to define parent and family engagement, school educator and administrator responses centered on themes of creating welcoming environments, communication, and collaboration. An elementary school principal in the urban district described family needs as "to feel welcome, to feel informed, to feel that their culture is really valued…to have this expectation and belief that they can help. Language is not a barrier to support education at home." Another elementary school principal in the urban district focused on the importance of listening and being respectful as the foundation for parent–school communication: "They'll tell you if you listen." She believed that when educators actively listened, parents' feelings about their child's school became more positive: "That's when you're [moving] in the right direction." A senior urban district leader described multiple strategies for communicating with families but believed more was needed: "We've hit every imaginable vehicle we have, and I still don't think it's…where it needs to be." An administrator in the rural/suburban district said, "I think it's just developing relationships so that [families] feel comfortable, so that they get the full benefits of everything that schools have to offer." A central office administrator in the rural district said:

Two words: communication and collaboration. You've got to communicate with the school, and the school needs to communicate with you. However that has to happen, however many other people have to be involved to make sure it happens, that's what it's all about.

The Spanish teacher in the rural district echoed the value of personal outreach and consequences of not reaching out, "I would say [with] the Hispanic parents, if you make a personal contact, they're the most on board, but if you don't make that contact, they assume everything's ok."

Not all immigrant parents were Spanish speakers, including some Latin American parents who spoke an indigenous language. While schools are required to identify English learners via a home language survey or registration forms (Staples, 2017), school office staff answering the phones did not always recognize the language needs of the caller. For example, the mother who spoke French described calling the school and being forwarded to a Spanish-speaking staff member because she had an accent. The mother who spoke Russian was not aware of programs for parents who spoke languages other than Spanish. Recognizing that not all immigrant families spoke Spanish, a rural district administrator said their approach was to call the families: "You just pick up the phone. You just talk to them and say, 'Hey, can you come in?'" She believed that these personalized relational approaches went a long way: "One-on-one goes, I think, further than anything else, than any newsletter we could ever send out. If you just have that one-on-one conversation, number one, they know you care and that you're going to not give up."

### Intermediaries

The critical role of intermediaries in parent–educator communication was a central theme in the data. Intermediaries are defined as individuals who facilitated interpersonal exchanges between immigrant parents and K–12 educators as part of their roles. Among the six school-based intermediaries interviewed were two family liaisons in the urban district, two ESL teachers in the rural/suburban district, and one ESL teacher and one high school Spanish teacher in the rural district. The nine adult ESL instructors also served as intermediaries, often working behind the scenes to help their adult learners prepare to communicate with school staff. While facilitation often emanated from the ability to communicate in a shared language, the assistance described by intermediaries went well beyond literal translation to convey information in manners they believed most likely to be understood by the listener, whether parent or educator. To do this, they drew on language and cultural knowledge, awareness of parent and educator perspectives, and their relationships—particularly with parents—to engender trust.

### School-Based Intermediaries

Intermediaries in the three districts held a variety of roles that involved engaging with families of English learners. The urban district had the most formalized system with a family liaison who was a dual language speaker at every school. The senior district leader viewed these individuals as key for communication: "Those are our resources." A liaison in this district originally from Latin America explained, "I am the bridge between the schools and the Hispanic speaking population in the school system." She believed her role entailed a wide range of activities:

> Talk to the parents; call the parents when their kids are not here; behavior issues, obviously. I translate the letters that [go] out from the school. Phone calls. Home visits. Transportation issues. So, everything that [the school staff and teachers] cannot communicate with the parent.

This bridging work could include messages that needed to be communicated delicately—for example, explaining to a mother what the school considered appropriate physical contact: "I have to…find a way not to be rude or [for it to] be difficult for her to…understand." She also regularly helped teachers understand the cultural and personal perspectives of parents. She explained, "This is back and forth all day long, you know, because it's the same with Americans."

The other liaison with family ties to Latin America described her role similarly, with an emphasis on facilitating intercultural understanding: "I feel like I am a really good bicultural agent. I understand an awful lot. I understand even more cultural identities of these folks that I work with even over their linguistic identities." She took teachers and administrators on home visits and helped her colleagues determine the cause of teacher–family communication breakdowns. As an illustration, she described a teacher who was confused because papers sent home in the weekly folder were never signed. The liaison phoned the family and learned that they had never attended school and could not read the papers.

The rural/suburban district relied heavily on ESL teachers—whose primary role was to teach children—and guidance counselors to facilitate communication with families. ESL teacher roles vis-à-vis families appeared less clearly defined and thus may have allowed for greater variation in practice. One of the ESL teachers originally from Latin America divided her time between a middle school and a high school; she had also worked as an adult ESL instructor. She described her current role with a laugh, "kind of guidance. Social services. Mother Teresa." She believed the existing system worked because the population of EL students was low. If the population grew, more resources would be needed: "Doing all that stuff, you need a liaison." She was in touch with

parents and gave them her cell phone number. She counseled parents about how to communicate with teachers to demonstrate commitment: "You need to show that you're involved. You need to show you care. Even if you don't speak the language…you just come here and make yourself visible." The other ESL teacher, a younger White male who had studied in Latin America, described less direct interaction with parents although he, too, shared his cell phone number. He said school administrators often asked him to interpret when a Spanish-speaking parent came to the school. Often the interpretation was for "very mundane things, such as, we need to schedule this meeting, what time are you available?"

At the time of the study, the rural district was expanding its resources to include more interaction with immigrant families. An elementary school ESL teacher who spoke some Spanish had been recently appointed to build family outreach. Her prior intercultural experience was primarily as a bilingual pre-school teacher in another state. She envisioned her new role was to "get more parents into the school, but also give them resources for how to help their child." However, her immediate focus was on meeting basic language needs such as finding translators for documents and conferences and preparing automated calls and text messages. In this rural district, a long-time high school Spanish teacher who had lived in Latin America said she was often called in to facilitate. She assisted with a range of communications from organizing events to special needs evaluations: "We have to have that conversation with the parent. We can't just let it happen. So, when it happens to [be a] Hispanic student, I'm the phone caller."

### External Intermediaries: Adult ESL Instructors

Although external to the school, several of the adult ESL instructors assisted parents with understanding exchanges between home and school, facilitated interactions when district leaders visited the adult ESL classes, and advised parents about how to engage with school staff. Advising occurred in the form of planned activities during the adult ESL classes and on an individual basis when parents approached the ESL instructor seeking assistance. For example, an adult ESL instructor asked her class to brainstorm about questions to ask a child's teacher and urged parents to bring a notebook to the conference. Another adult ESL instructor who was also an immigrant coached parents, "We do practice…in our class, and then I do the follow up." She encouraged her adult learners to not be deterred by their language skills: "I told them it does not have to be the correct English. Don't worry about the sentence structure. You speak even if it's broken English; they will appreciate." An adult ESL instructor who taught an advanced class encouraged parents to meet without an

interpreter: "If their English is good enough, they don't need a translator. So, I try to give them the vocabulary that they need."

## Discussion and Implications

This study explored participants' views on home–school communication in three communities undergoing significant demographic changes. This section begins by considering the frequency with which parents referenced home–school communication, situating it in prior research. Then the section analyzes supports and challenges identified by study participants and offers recommendations for K–12 educators in other districts that have had limited experience engaging and communicating with immigrant families.

Many parents enrolled in the adult ESL classes identified home–school communication as a parent activity. This finding is somewhat inconsistent with research that suggests immigrant parents from many cultures may view separate spheres of influence for parents and schools in a child's development (e.g., Trumbull et al., 2003; Valdés, 1996). On the other hand, studies have also found that immigrant parents do identify home–school communication as a parent engagement activity and respond positively to specific invitations from the teacher or school to be involved (e.g., Poza et al., 2014; Vera et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2011). There are several possible explanations for parent identification of home–school communication in the study. First, perhaps parents were aware of and responding to school-initiated outreach to immigrant families. However, such efforts appeared uneven across the districts. Second, decisions to participate in both the adult ESL program and this study may indicate these parents were predisposed to recognize and value English language communication, generally, and home–school communication, in particular. Third, the adult ESL course and instructors may have influenced parent beliefs. The survey and majority of parent interviews were conducted in the spring when learners had been enrolled for several months. These were general ESL classes serving the diverse learning goals of adults in the class. Parent engagement was not a targeted curricular focus unless requested by the adult learners. Prior research indicates that some adult learners report changes in parent engagement practices in general adult ESL classes (e.g., Shiffman, 2013; Waterman, 2009).

Consistent with prior research, the school supports most frequently identified in parent interviews tended to be relational in nature (e.g., Ferguson, 2008; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Sibley & Dearing, 2014; Turney & Kao, 2009). The K–12 educators interviewed similarly focused on relationship-building approaches to communication including the importance of making families

feel welcome, using multiple mediums to communicate, and making personal connections. Where present, mutual desire to communicate is a promising foundation for relationships between immigrant families and schools.

Much of the home–school communication described by parents and K–12 educators in this study was structured by the school, such as parent–teacher conferences and written information sent to parents. Within that context, parents' preferences in communication were based on skills and self-efficacy. Access to a school-based interpreter for oral communication was a critical resource for the Spanish-speaking parent participants and the school. This provided families with a level of comfort and some assurance that they would understand and be understood. However, the study findings suggest it is important to recognize that parents vary in their desire for language support as they work towards independent communication. Those enrolled in adult ESL classes did so, in part, to be able to communicate independently with their child's teachers. At the same time, miscommunication is more possible when an interpreter is not present and communication relies on the English learner and/or a family member. Finding a balance between these two competing needs takes sensitivity. Furthermore, parents who are not native English speakers often need more time to express themselves. Schools should schedule longer blocks of time for parent–teacher conferences with parents who are not native English speakers.

While the presence of a Spanish speaker at school events was important to the Spanish-speaking parents, such a resource was not readily available for non-Spanish speakers. This highlights the need for districts experiencing rapid demographic change to develop communication systems, staff, and resources that will have broad applications. Future newcomers to a district may speak other languages. Districts with long histories of receiving EL students from around the world can be important resources.

Written communication between school and home posed two key challenges in this study. For the majority of parent participants who had sufficient literacy skills, a concern centered on written communication translated into Spanish through online language translation programs that created confusion. For the smaller number of parent participants with limited literacy skills in their first language, any written communication posed significant challenges to accessing school information. Without knowing the parents of EL students and their literacy skills, educators risk not conveying essential information to parents and misreading parents' lack of responsiveness as disinterest. This finding suggests that investing in individuals who understand the nuances of a given language and can gauge the intended audience's literacy skills is a strategic use of school and district resources to strengthen communication.

Reliance on technology to convey information quickly and easily is becoming pervasive. School systems face the challenge of ensuring equitable access to information in both quantity and depth through multiple mediums. In this study, parents' use of the internet to access school and district information appeared limited although parents' interest was high. Several strategies might improve digital communications between EL families and schools. First, schools should provide training for families in how to navigate school and district websites. Some parents may need basic training to operate computers and other devices. Second, schools should design websites with low literacy readers in mind and involve parents in the development. Third, schools should enhance communications that can be easily conducted through multiple means including cell phones.

Communication challenges cannot be fully understood or addressed without relationships. How else can school staff learn if a parent is able to read forms sent home in Spanish (or any other language) or the extent of parents' internet use? In this study, intermediaries played a critical role facilitating communication that went well beyond direct language translation to incorporate understanding of cultural and linguistic attributes that shape interactions. Consistent with prior studies that have examined these roles, the intermediaries in this study described their work using terms like "bridge" and "bicultural agent" (e.g., Guo, 2010; Haneda & Alexander, 2015; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Yohani, 2013). This role enhanced communication between individual immigrant families and the schools. Intermediaries also possess the potential to facilitate understanding more broadly in new destination communities between longtime residents' and newcomers (Shiffman, 2013). Most of the intermediaries had previous experiences and language skills that informed their work, consistent with findings by Haneda and Alexander (2015). They articulated an awareness of and sensitivity to language and culture and spoke of parents with respect. Several intermediaries with Spanish language skills described providing this facilitation for multiple organizations in their communities—schools, adult education programs, or hospitals. This may be more common in new destination communities where there are fewer individuals with the needed linguistic and intercultural skills.

Prior experiences and language skills did not fully explain differences in intermediaries' approaches to facilitating communication. Further research should explore the influences of individual dispositions, intercultural training and experiences, language skills, institutional resources, and specified responsibilities of intermediaries. A key structural difference across the districts was the designated roles of intermediaries. The urban district had dedicated family liaisons who were dual language speakers. The other districts relied on intermediaries

with multiple responsibilities. For these individuals, their facilitation work was in addition to other obligations. There is likely to be more variation in how individuals decide to carry out their facilitation of home–school communication when this is one of many responsibilities.

For school districts turning to intermediaries to facilitate home–school communication, it is important to consider how intermediaries' institutional affiliations allow for different types of facilitation. Those employed by the district are extensions of their schools. As such, they can most easily facilitate communication that conforms to the expectations and needs of their school and colleagues (e.g., Ishimaru et al., 2016; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). Intermediaries external to the school system such as adult ESL instructors may have less direct knowledge of the school context and staff communication needs but greater ability to develop relationships with parents independent of the school and work behind the scenes to help parents express their concerns and priorities (Brezicha & Hopkins, 2016; Shiffman, 2013). When the emphasis is on learners' goals, these classes may be important spaces for those with family engagement priorities to prepare for home–school communication that moves beyond responding to school-initiated communication to that which is also parent-initiated.

## Conclusion

Communication that is authentic, meaningful, and bidirectional provides the foundation for trusting relationships between families and educators that support student learning and well-being (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 1988; Crosnoe, 2009). For new destination communities, nurturing cultures of meaningful interaction between families and educators hold special considerations because the infrastructure, professional staff, and resources needed to engage with immigrant families are in the development stage (e.g., Lowenhaupt & Reeves, 2015; Wainer, 2004; Zehler et al., 2008). This study identified challenges and supports particular to different forms of communication (oral, written, and electronic) and illuminated the critical role of intermediaries who offer language and cultural interpretation. These findings offer insights for districts in new destination communities that are in the process of making decisions about how to invest resources and build capacity to strengthen communication.

**Endnotes**

[1]The term ESL (English as a Second Language) was used by the study participants, adult education program, and school districts to refer to these classes, programs, and educators.

[2]Based on spring 2015 enrollment data. As is common in adult ESL programs, attendance and enrollment fluctuated throughout the year.

[3]The larger study included observations of the adult ESL classes.

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